



Jessie Smallwood

August 9, 2023

Jessie Marie Smallwood was a native New Orleanian with childhood roots in the Lower 9th Ward. She attended McDonough #6 elementary school, high school at Gilbert Academy and Gaudet before graduating from Xavier University in 1955 with a BS in Medical Technology.

In 1972, she went on to earn master's degrees in Public Health and City Planning from the University of California at Berkeley. After Berkeley Jessie joined Arthur D. Little, providing health planning/ administration, city and regional planning, housing development expertise.

In 1976 Jessie returned to Louisiana to support better health and housing access in her home state. First serving as the Assistant Commissioner of Administration for Louisiana under Governor Edwin Edwards, working on veterans and early childhood education programs. In New Orleans, Jessie served as the first Executive Director of the Bayou Region Health Systems Agency where she established criteria and standards for measuring the cost effectiveness and efficiency of key health services.

Jessie may be best remembered for her work as the Executive Director of the Housing Authority of New Orleans. Well known for both her support of tenants and solid financial management of the agency. During her tenure she moved the agency from budget deficit to a nearly \$3 million dollar reserve.

Jessie's public service resumed after Hurricane Katrina, when she agreed to return to government as Deputy Director of the Office of Recovery Management at the City of New Orleans to help rebuild the city she loved by securing projects to provide long term recovery support for local residents.

Jessie pursued her passion for historic housing by renovating an 1852 New Orleans home. Saved from the city demolition list, Jessie researched the property's history to assure an appropriate restoration and earned an award for preservation excellence.

In 1989, Jessie's ongoing interest in finance and investments led her to pursue training and achieved certification (1989) as a licensed life insurance agent and later (2012) was licensed as a financial advisor.

Jessie loved music, jazz, gospel but especially the blues. She was trained in modern dance and thoroughly enjoyed her beloved city's art and culture.

Smart, witty, outspoken, thoughtful, challenging, yet kind and giving. Jessie lived her life to her fullest. She demanded excellence and believed that everyone had the ability to learn and contribute.

Jessie leaves behind daughters Rima M. Theard and Brita A. Theard-Blum (Eugene Blum); granddaughter Jessica L. Theard-Fleming and scores of close friends and former associates. Public Servant, Business Owner, social Justice Advocate & Activist, Executive Director of the Housing Authority of New Orleans are invite to attend the memorial at D. W. Rhodes Funeral Home, 3933 Washington Ave. on Saturday October 7, 2023 at 12:30 pm. Visitation at 12:00 pm. Interment: Private. Arrangement by D. W. Rhodes Funeral Home, 3933 Washington Ave. Please visit www.rhodesfuneral.com to sign the online guestbook.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8858396735?pwd=eWdYTTFpVUdGUxptNTcvVGx4NTJvQT09>

Meeting ID: 885 839 6735

Passcode: 123456

Cemetery Details

Private

Previous Events

Memorial Visitation

OCT 7. 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM (CT)

Rhodes Funeral Home - Washington Avenue
3933 Washington Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70125
(504) 822-7162
<https://www.rhodesfuneral.com>

Memorial Service

OCT 7. 12:30 PM (CT)

Rhodes Funeral Home - Washington Avenue
3933 Washington Avenue
New Orleans, LA 70125
(504) 822-7162
<https://www.rhodesfuneral.com>

Tribute Wall

PR

“ *My prayers go out to the family of my friend and mentor. She lived life to the fullest!*

Pat Robinson - January 01, 2025 at 08:04 AM

SP

“ *My prayers and thoughts go out to the family of my dear friend Jessie! She was a pillar of strength to me and my daughters during a most difficult time. I will never forget her spirit of persistent and endurance! You said this day would come. I celebrate you! Now you are safely in our Heavenly Father's arms. Sylvia Lewis Plamer, Melody for Music*

Sylvia Lewis Palmer - October 07, 2023 at 02:28 PM

CR

“ *Carrie Robinson lit a candle in memory of Jessie Smallwood*



Carrie R Robinson - October 05, 2023 at 06:23 PM

KJ

“ *Rest in peace Xavierite and Eternal rest granted unto her soul.*



Kevin Joseph - October 04, 2023 at 04:41 PM

LJ

“ *Love Always, Juliana and Jim purchased the Enchanted Cottage for the family of Jessie Smallwood.*



Love Always, Juliana and Jim - October 04, 2023 at 02:22 PM

VF

“ *Community Book Center extends our deepest sympathies to the family, friends and colleagues of Ms. Jessie. Her life's work has lit the path for many and her legacy will live on. God bless you!*

Vera Warren Williams & Family - October 04, 2023 at 07:56 AM